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ABSTRACT

This annotated bibliography lists 57 literary works for use in a freshman composition and American Literature course that uses the life cycle theme as the central approach; also included are observations on and guidelines for teaching such a course. Contained in the bibliography are 17 works dealing with youth, 21 works dealing with middle age, and 19 works dealing with old age. Observations are made pertaining to teaching the life cycle theme in freshman English classes. Appended to the bibliography are the following materials: (1) an abstract of a study of the impact of older people as peers in the classroom on attitudes and on performance of undergraduates; (2) a course syllabus using materials listed in the bibliography; (3) five essay assignments given to two freshmen English classes studying the life cycle theme; (4) mid-term and final examinations for the course; and (5) a small group assignment dealing with thoughts on growing older. (The above-mentioned study is available separately--see note.) (MN)

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A Suggested Annotated Bibliography

of Twentieth-Century American Literature

by

Barbara H. Jensen-Osinski

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Lehigh University

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I often want to say to people, "You have neat, tight expectations of what life ought to give you, but you won't get it. That isn't what life does. Life does not accommodate you, it shatters you. It is meant to, and it couldn't do it better. Every seed destroys its container or else there would be no fruition."

But some wouldn't hear, and some would shatter themselves on principle.

Florida Scott-Maxwell
in The Measure of My Days.
New York: Penguin Books,
1979, p. 65.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
INTRODUCTION		iv
I.	YOUTH	1
II.	MIDDLE AGE	8
III.	OLD AGE	15
IV.	OBSERVATIONS ON TEACHING THE LIFE CYCLE THEME IN FRESHMAN ENGLISH CLASSES	23

Appendices:

A.	Abstract of "The Graying of the College Classroom" Project Report	41
B.	Syllabus for Two Freshman English Classes Studying the Life Cycle Theme	44
C.	Numbers of Ideas Expressed in Discussions of Four Works of Literature in Two Experimental Classes	47
D.	Essay Assignments Given to Two Freshman English Classes Studying the Life Cycle Theme	48
E.	Midterm and Final Examinations Given to Two Freshman English Classes Studying the Life Cycle Theme	54
F.	Some Thoughts on Growing Older — An Assignment for Small Groups	57

INTRODUCTION

This bibliography is an outgrowth of the syllabus I used in a freshman composition and literature course at Lehigh University in the Spring, 1981. Part of a research project funded by the NRTA-AARP Andrus Foundation, the course was offered not as an informational course on aging or the aged but as a normal freshman English course in which the life cycle theme was used as an instructional tool for unlocking discussion and writing topics. The abstract of the research project report is shown in Appendix A; the course syllabus is shown in Appendix B.

That we are capable of development at every stage of life (growth), that we "age" from the moment we are born (mortality), and that we remain ourselves whether young or old, innocent or mature (continuity), are the three interlocking concepts behind what I call the life cycle theme. These ideas became the criteria for selection of material for the course and bibliography. I found that, while most good literature touches on at least one of these ideas, particular works seem to exemplify them more than others do. However, given these broad criteria, I was happy to narrow the field to include only twentieth-century American literature. I selected literature representing five genres: novels, plays, novellas, short stories, and poetry. In the course and in this bibliography, I have arranged the works into three groupings according to ages of central characters: youth, middle age, and old age. The annotations explain why the works might be used in a course on aging and which of the three concepts noted above—growth, mortality, and continuity—appear to be most important in each work.

I do not pretend to have developed a comprehensive, or even selected, bibliography. The word "suggested" is most appropriate for two reasons: first, because I offer this booklet as a collection of suggestions, and second, because most of the works listed here were suggested to me by colleagues and other friends who, hearing about the project, became interested and thought of titles that might work well. Unfortunately, a shortage of time prevented me from following up on all of these kind suggestions; I am acutely aware of the paucity of content in this volume. I only hope that the entries I have made will stimulate other teachers to seek out additional works for their courses--some by the authors listed here, others surely by writers I failed to list. For more comprehensive bibliographies, see Humanistic Perspectives on Aging, Second Edition, edited by Walter G. Moss (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1976); A Literary Bibliography on Aging, edited by Constance E. Kellam (NY: Council on Social Work Education, 1968); and Winter Tales: Fiction About Aging, by Celia Berdes (Washington, D.C., 1981).

To teach a humanities course with an aging theme is certainly not unique to the Lehigh project. In fact, scholars from several colleges and universities gathered this past summer at Case Western Reserve University for an NEH Institute in Aging and Literature. They designed model courses in their fields of specialty, incorporating at least one unit on aging in each. (I refer the reader to Professor Lee K. Abbott, Jr., of the Department of English, Case Western Reserve University, for further information on the Institute.) But, because few people have documented their successes and failures with such courses, I have included a separate chapter here on my own teaching experience. This chapter may be of some interest to people involved in intergenerational programs and adult education because I discuss teaching the life cycle theme to two sections of freshman English: one an all-freshman class, the other a class made up of 14 regular (18 and 19 year old) freshmen and ten students over 60 years of age.

During the course of the project, many people contributed support in the form of suggestions and constructive criticism, and I could not have developed either the course or the bibliography without them. Faculty members of Lehigh University's Department of English were extremely helpful, particularly Professor Peter G. Beidler, who served as co-investigator in the research project, and Professor James R. Frakes. Mrs. Judith L. Aronson, project assistant, offered invaluable ideas and support; serving as observer, she saw first-hand just what was going well and what was going poorly. The students in English 2A and 2D deserve my appreciation for their cooperation and good will. They were a joy to work with. Co-investigator Edwin J. Kay and Advisory group members Kathleen A. Dalgaard, Roy C. Herrenkohl, and Patricia J. Horton, although not directly involved in the course itself, provided essential support to all other phases of the project.

Lehigh University's Office of Research, College of Arts and Science, Department of English, and Center for Social Research receive thanks for their full support of this work. And, finally, I offer thanks to the NRTA-AARP Andrus Foundation for financially supporting the project.

Barbara H. Jensen-Osinski
Department of English
Lehigh University
December, 1981

I. YOUTH

1. Agee, James. A Death in the Family. New York: McDowell, Oblensky, 1957.

Novel. Growth, mortality, continuity.

Small boy confronted with conflicting views on religion and on the death of his young father. After an automobile accident, family members respond in different ways to the father's death, from the young widow's devout, literal Catholicism to her brother's atheism, other characters presenting a range of views in between. Seven-year-old son tries to select the most livable explanation. Novel depicts beautifully the development of strength in the boy's mother and uncle, but its most engaging element is the story of the boy's emotional responses and of the continuity, in him, of his father's best qualities.

2. Anderson, Sherwood. "Death in the Woods." In Death in the Woods and Other Stories. New York: Liveright, Inc., 1933.

Short story. Mortality, continuity.

In an encounter with death, the narrator senses beauty and completeness. From his childhood he remembers a poor elderly woman who died in the woods while walking home with a pack of meat on her back. Several dogs, sensing her death, ran in a circle, each in turn sniffing her to check that she was still living. When she died, they dragged her body into the center of the clearing and ate the food in the pack. After many years, the narrator can make sense of the old woman's story: he sees continuity in her having given both life and death to the feeding of animals.

3. Anderson, Sherwood. "Departure." In Winesburg, Ohio. New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1919.

Short story. Growth.

Unsentimental account of a young man's departure from the small town of Winesburg to begin his career. Illustrates the mechanics of transitions: the reader is told what actually occurs from moment to moment and sees how instantaneously a person can move from the "before" to the "after" once he has set the wheels of change in motion. The landscape of the young man's small-town life looks vastly different to him at 4 a.m. from the way it looks at 7 a.m. and, finally, after his train has left. A simple departure turns his entire life to this point into his "past."

4. Cheever, John. "Pot of Gold." In The Enormous Radio, and Other Stories. New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1953.

Short story. Growth.

Tender story of a young couple dealing with the difficulty of accepting reality. In the early years of marriage they feel everything is ahead of them, but they find one hope after the other dashed as they struggle for respectable middle-class life. They are struck in lives of mediocrity. The husband finally realizes that his wife is his "pot of gold."

5. Cheever, John. "The Sorrows of Gin." In Housebreaker of Shady Hill, and Other Stories. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958.

Short story. Growth.

Contrast between a little girl's and her father's views. The child sees her middle-class, middle-aged parents' world as cheap patchwork; one day she pours her father's gin down the sink and runs away from home. Her father, accusing the baby-sitter of the gin incident and wondering how he can convince his daughter that staying home is better than going away, fails to understand the girl's two dramatic statements. The father seems incapable of the growth his daughter seeks.

6. Faulkner, William. "Barn Burning." In Harpers Magazine, 197, no. 1069, June 1939.

Short story. Growth.

Young boy faced with moral dilemma of choosing between blood ties and his own sense of right. At the beginning of the story, the boy recalls an incident in which a judge saved him from telling the truth about his father, who makes a practice of burning the barn of anyone he thinks has wronged him. The boy decides that blood ties are most important until the day his father decides to burn still another barn, this time without sending a warning. After the boy has warned the owners, he falls asleep in a field and awakens at dawn to see the family wagon drive away. He has entered a new stage of maturity by standing up to his father.

7. Fitzgerald, F. Scott. "The Ice Palace." In Flappers and Philosophers. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920.

Short story. Growth.

A 19-year-old Southern girl, engaged to a young man in the Northeast, is repelled by the coldness of Northern society. The isolation she feels while visiting his family presents itself in stark physical form when she, her fiancé, and several of his friends tour an underground ice cavern. She finally rejects the role of well-behaved fiancée in favor of the comfort of her Southern home town. Whether she has grown or regressed may be a point for discussion.

8. Fitzgerald, F. Scott. "The Rich Boy." In All the Sad Young Men. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925.

Short story. Mortality, continuity, lack of growth.

Wealthy, immature young man seems old before his time because of his inability to grow emotionally. His self-centered charm, a source of delight for his friends, becomes a handicap in adulthood when he is faced with and fails to make real commitments. The story ends ambiguously: the young man's premature "mortality" is sad, but his friends nevertheless find comfort in the fact that he remains bachelor bon vivant.

9. Gold, Herbert. "The Heart of the Artichoke." In Perspectives. London: Hamish Hamilton, Ltd., Winter 1954.

Short story. Mortality, growth.

Retrospective of a boy's twelfth year, when he worked in his father's small New York corner grocery. When the father called him a lazy playboy, the boy rebelled. In the painful mental and physical struggle between father and son, both lost. The father lost his self-respect when his son won the physical battle; the son lost his childhood. Both sensed their own mortality and had to begin anew without illusions.

10. Hughes, Langston. "Young Gal's Blues." In Selected Poems of Langston Hughes. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1927.

Poem. Mortality.

Four-stanza blues lyric spoken by young black woman beautifully expresses fear of aging and empathy with the very old. The speaker desperately believes that love has the power to overcome mortality. She ends the poem by asking her man to love her so she will not be blue.

11. Jackson, Shirley. "Charles." In The Lottery. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1949.

Short story. Growth.

Kindergartner learns to manipulate other children, the teacher, and his parents. At home he talks about a boy named Charles who has misbehaved in school but who later appears to behave while actually getting other children to be bad. His mother learns that "Charles" is her son when she asks the teacher about this precocious child and learns that no child by that name is in the class.

12. Porter, Katherine Anne. "Old Mortality." In Pale Horse, Pale Rider. New York: Harcourt, 1939.

Short story. Growth, mortality, continuity.

Sensitive three-part story about two sisters growing up in a multi-generational Southern family. The central character, fascinated by the memories of her elders, is jealous of their having witnessed wonderful events and having known interesting people. After several traumatic childhood experiences, she loses her naiveté. The final scene, however, is a major turning point for her: feeling left out of a conversation between her father and an elderly cousin, who have lived through the same events together, she determines to make her own life so that she can "know the truth" about what happens to her.

13. Porter, Katherine Anne. "Pale Horse, Pale Rider." In Pale Horse, Pale Rider. New York: Harcourt, 1939.

Short story. Mortality.

Dearness of life in the face of mortality. The central character of "Old Mortality," now a young woman, works as theater critic for a small-town Southern newspaper during World War I. She and the young soldier she loves try to maintain a semblance of normal life in the midst of the war, but while she is recovering from severe influenza, he dies of the same disease. The young woman moves in and out of, and finally back into, life, with continually changing emotions about life and death. At the beginning, the two feel they have unlimited life to live but no time in which to live it; ironically, the central character finally has "time for everything" but her young man is gone.

Companion piece to "Old Mortality" (Entry 12) and "The Old Order" (Entry 53), both by Porter.

14. Roth, Philip. The Ghost Writer. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979.

Novel. Lack of growth.

Two men appear incapable of growth because of their narcissitic blindness. A young writer tells about his overnight visit to the New England home of a middle-aged writer and his wife. The narrator worships the older man, seeking paternal affirmation from him because his own father harshly criticizes his writing. The younger man fails to recognize the intense sadness of the older man's failed marriage. Both men pursue art before life; this common characteristic makes the younger man appear annoyingly immature and renders the older writer pathetic and cruel.

15. Singer, Isaac Bashevis. "A Major Din Torah." In In My Father's Court. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962.

Short story. Growth, continuity.

A boy's introduction to sophistication. Rabbi's son, listening to a group of rabbis discussing a dispute, realizes that the others are more worldly than his father. Ashamed of his father's ignorance, he also observes that the sophisticated Rabbis have caused his father deep pain; after the dispute his father speaks to him about the simple people "upon whom depends the continued existence of the world." The boy seems to have learned something about the difference between wisdom and cleverness, although whether or not he believes his father possesses wisdom is left an open question.

16. Steinbeck, John. The Red Pony. New York: Covici-Friede, 1937.

Novella in four parts. Growth, mortality, continuity.

Four episodes awaken and bring maturity to a young boy growing up on a California ranch. In Part I, "The Red Pony," the boy's beautiful red colt becomes sick and dies: in his first encounter with the death of one he loves, he learns that neither responsible care nor revenge can alter the fact of mortality. In Part II, "The Great Mountains," the boy is drawn to and gains respect for an elderly native American who walks onto the ranch from the Great Mountains, announcing that he wants to die on the land where he was born. In Part III, "The Promise," the ranch hand sacrifices a well-loved mare in order to give the boy the healthy colt he has been promised. The boy recognizes how difficult it is for the ranch hand to perform the fatal operation. Part IV, "The Leader of the People," finds the boy once again fascinated by an old man, this time his grandfather. Risking his father's scorn, the boy asks his grandfather to tell old stories; he has learned to care for another person even if it means being ostracized.

17. Updike, John. "The Dogwood Tree: A Boyhood." In Five Boyhoods, edited by Martin Levin. New York: Doubleday, 1962. (This story is not easy to find. It is included in Gottesman, Ronald, et al., eds., The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Volume 2. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979.)

Short story. Growth, continuity.

Retrospective of a boyhood in a small Pennsylvania town during the Depression years. Boy's-eye-view geography includes evocative sensory details about people, events, and things that shaped his concepts of intelligence and stupidity, wealth and poverty, friendship, death, and life. Narrator traces development of his own sense of a personal history, one unique from his parents'. Tells how he felt when he returned to the town and found things changed. Image of the dogwood tree in his old back yard symbolizes his own birth, growth, and continuity of character.

II. MIDDLE AGE

Agee, James. A Death in the Family.

Novel. Growth, mortality, continuity.

See entry 1, in YOUTH Section.

18. Bellow, Saul. Henderson, the Rain King. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, 1959.

Novel. Mortality, growth, continuity.

Middle-class American travels through deepest Africa on a search for the truth about death. His mortality is poignant in the context of his own earthy sexuality and that of the strong young warriors and fat native women he encounters. Feeling emotionally immature at the start, he endures strenuous and frightening tests of strength; by the end of the novel, he believes in the possibility of change even though his basic inner core remains the same.

19. Bellow, Saul. Seize the Day. New York: Viking Press, 1956.

Novel. Growth, mortality, continuity.

Middle-aged failed actor and salesman, living in the same New York hotel as his well-respected, fit, and impatient father, falls prey to a psychologizing con man who spectulates with his last dollars. Themes include the relationship between an elderly father and his middle-aged son, the strength of an older man contrasted with the weakness of a younger man, the merits of the son's openness to outside influence and hence capacity for change, the older man's response to his own mortality, and the continuity in each of a distinct central personality.

20. Cheever, John. "The Cure." In The Enormous Radio, and Other Stories. New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1953.

Short story. Growth.

Middle-aged man's split and reunion with his wife. Told by the husband, who thinks he is going mad until his wife rescues him with a telephone call. Growth results from mutual acknowledgement that both need each other to care for.

21. Cheever, John. "O Youth and Beauty." In Housebreaker of Shady Hill, and Other Stories. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958.

Short story. Mortality, lack of growth.

Man in early middle age discovers his own mortality and lets it destroy him. A former track star, he performs a traditional "race" at parties, jumping over furniture. One night he misses and ends up in the hospital; from that time on he becomes depressed whenever he smells odors of rot and of earth. One night he asks his wife to fire the pistol so he can do the race in his own living room. She accidentally shoots him in mid-air over the couch.

22. Cheever, John. "The Summer Farmer." In The Enormous Radio and Other Stories. New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1953.

Short story. Mortality, growth.

During a summer vacation on a New England farm, a middle-aged father experiences a "loss of principle" that makes him feel older and more mortal. Whether or not his recognition of this loss will lead to growth of character might be a point for discussion.

23. Cheever, John. "The Swimmer." In The Brigadier and the Golf Widow. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964.

Short story. Mortality, growth.

Allegory about a middle-aged man who swims, from a friend's house to his own via the suburban pools between them, in celebration of his apparently rich, happy life. While the swimmer becomes colder, weaker, and unhappier about his epic swim, the reader realizes that this man has undergone financial, and possibly even mental, collapse. Story illustrates mortality in the form of physical aging: on this late summer day the swimmer feels the season change to autumn as if he were suddenly growing older. He has failed to mature because he has been unable to absorb the reality of his own situation; the swim may be his subconscious mind's way of alerting him to the truth.

24. Frost, Robert. "Home Burial." In The Poems of Robert Frost. New York: Random House, Inc., 1946.

Poem. Mortality.

Poignant account of two people who have been separated rather than brought together by mortality. Dialogue between husband and wife who have recently lost a baby. The death of their son has destroyed the wife's spirit, and the husband cannot reach her.

Gold, Herbert. "The Heart of the Artichoke."

Short story. Mortality, growth.

See Entry 9, in YOUTH section.

25. Lardner, Ring. "Old Folks' Christmas." In The Best Short Stories of Ring Lardner. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957.

Short story. Growth.

Over a Christmas holiday, husband and wife try to stave off bitterness and disappointment over their children's indifference to them; they finally discover that they need to have a life of their own. Experiencing a painful form of growth, they appear to move successfully into a new stage of life.

26. Miller, Jason. That Championship Season. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1972.

Play. Mortality, lack of growth, continuity.

Biting satire of five men's insistence upon living in the past. At their yearly reunion, a retired high-school basketball coach and his former champions rehash the story of their championship game, which they won twenty years ago by cheating. Their growth is stunted because they see everything in terms of winning the game; the coach still runs the lives of his "boys." They assert that nothing changes but the clock. The truth is that because the clock moves in real life, people too must move on; the sad thing is that these men do not see even the necessity for change.

27. Percy, Walker. The Moviegoer. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961.

Novel. Growth.

Growth of character in an early-middle-aged man. Because the central character undertakes a conscious "search," he is at least partially responsible for his own progression into a more satisfying state of mind. Rejecting the traditional "vertical" values because he feels they have been worn out by overuse, he makes a "horizontal" search, looking for clues in the ordinary, small things of life. Although he does not know what he is looking for, he recognizes those things that make him feel at one with himself. Once he has opened himself up to the possibility of change, wiser people like his mother, brother, and fiancée help him overcome his self-consciousness and quietly show him how to live.

28. Sarton, May. "Gestalt at Sixty." In A Durable Fire, New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1972.

Poem. Growth, mortality, continuity.

Spiritual poem. Speaker likens her body to a house into which people come and go, changing her and being changed at the same time. The house is alone and yet is always being visited. She recognizes her own mortality and she feels that change and continuity are inseparable and inevitable for her. Because she has been able to reconcile herself to change, she can experience true "gestalt," knowing at once how it feels to be both an infant and a very old woman. Finally, she is able to accept mortality because she is "learning to trust death" as she has "trusted life."

29. Sarton, May. "A Hard Death." In A Grain of Mustard Seed, New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1971.

Poem. Mortality.

Middle-aged woman recalls her mother's death and tells about two facts that affected her strongly: that while the dying are in the process of dying they are also very much living, and that everyone dies alone. She concludes that we must be "gentle to each other" because "[o]nly the living can be healed by love."

30. Sarton, May. "My Father's Death." In In Time Like Air, New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1958.

Poem. Mortality, growth.

Death of her father becomes a painful sort of birth and forced growth for the speaker in this poem. No longer a daughter, she feels "all stripped down" and "full grown."

31. Sarton, May. "On Being Given Time." In In Time Like Air, New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1958.

Poem. Continuity (in sense of renewal).

Celebration of the renewing, life-giving moments that compose real time as opposed to time marked by the clock. Eloquent statement of the gift of continuity; anyone, at any age, can feel such moments and can reclaim life as it was in childhood, when children "play the game of morning without end."

32. Steinbeck, John. "Junius Maltby." In The Pastures of Heaven. New York: Covici-Friede, 1937.

Short story. Growth, mortality.

Charming but lazy middle-aged father gives up rural farm to move to the city so his son can be brought up with the amenities. His ability to sacrifice his version of paradise for his son's well-being is touching, but he ages in the process. The reader wonders whether father and son should have stayed on the farm.

33. Updike, John. Of the Farm. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1965

Novel. Mortality, continuity.

Middle-aged man encounters mortality during a visit to his mother's farm. He recounts his feelings upon noticing his mother's intense love for life as shown in several ways—her sentimentality about his youth, her fear of his new life, her dread of becoming useless, her tender care of the farm, and her use of the "old language" established long ago between mother and son. Continuity of his mother's spirit becomes essential to the narrator, particularly after a heart attack makes her look like an old woman rather than like the "heavier version of the swift young mother" he remembers.

34. Updike, John. "Separating." In The New Yorker, 1975.

Short story. Growth.

Difficulty of reversing a course of action once the direction has been set. Husband and wife decide to tell their children, all on the same day, that they plan to separate. The man, seeing every task as a barrier between his safe present and the unknown future, tries to prolong every moment and avoid the confrontations that hurry him toward the separation. When his son asks him why he is leaving, he suddenly realizes that he does not know the answer. By considering this question, however, he opens up the possibility of making a conscious, deliberate decision rather than simply following the mindless course he has taken until now.

35. Warren, Robert Penn. A Place to Come To. New York: Random House, Inc., 1977.

Novel. Mortality, continuity, growth.

Retrospective by middle-aged man who has passed through a series of sexual relationships and has survived deaths of loved ones. He discovers the horror of rapid deterioration when his first wife dies of cancer. Aching to recapture a sense of continuity with family, he finally acts on this in three ways: by visiting his mother, by asking his second wife for a reconciliation, and by determining to show his son the places he knows. When he writes to his second wife, he says he hopes, in her company, to "learn, even as the light fails, a little of what I need to know." Familiarity with death makes his life and others' precious to him.

36. Welty, Eudora. "Death of a Travelling Salesman." In A Curtain of Green. New York: Doubleday, 1941.

Short story. Mortality.

Veteran salesman, recovering from a heart attack accidentially drives his car into a ravine and has to ask for help from a young man and his pregnant wife. He feels deprived of something the man and woman have together, though he does not know what it is. The two let him sleep in the house; after they go to bed he leaves money and goes out. As he reaches the road, he has a fatal attack. Trying to cover up his heart with his hands so that no one will hear the noise it makes, he dies, alone and unheard.

37. Wharton, Edith. Bunner Sisters. In The Edith Wharton Reader. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916.

Novella. Growth, continuity.

Two middle-aged sisters quietly run a small shop in New York in the early 1900s. Both women undergo changes because of adversities beyond their control. The elder loses her emotional innocence, while the younger exchanges petty selfishness for a childlike belief in God. After the younger sister dies, the elder sells the shop and looks for work in a commercial world that wants young, smart-looking saleswomen. While the novella illustrates a middle-aged woman's capacity for disillusion and change, it also pays tribute to the strength of will which enables her to survive.

38. Williams, Tennessee. A Streetcar Named Desire. New York: New American Library, 1947.

Play. Mortality, growth, continuity.

Sensitive, thirty-year-old, single woman, on a visit to her sister, desperately seeks comfort. She has survived the deaths of family members, financial ruin, and loss of both job and reputation. She is paying the high price of having chosen "desire" over "death," a choice that also represents her capacity for growth of spirit. Continuity of her strong central personality is evident in her refusal to acknowledge loss of dignity even after her brother-in-law exposes her soiled reputation and then physically rapes her.

III. OLD AGE

Anderson, Sherwood. "Death in the Woods."

Short story. Mortality, continuity.

See Entry 2, in YOUTH section.

39. Bellow, Saul. "Leaving the Yellow House." In Mosby's Memoirs, and Other Stories. New York: The Viking Press, 1968.

Short story. Mortality, continuity.

Eccentric, alcoholic old woman's gradual recognition of mortality and refusal to accept it. After an automobile accident renders her helpless, she continues to live hard. Her ability to appreciate sensual pleasures—watching mares in the field and smelling yellow roses in the yard—provides a thread of continuity with her past but also contrasts with her poor physical condition. Seeing her life as a film, she cannot see more than a beginning and a middle. Inability to see an end makes her grotesque but also becomes an admirable assertion of her will to live.

Secondary theme: contrast between an old woman whose sensuality is unappreciated and an old man (her neighbor) who consumes sex but possesses no sensuality or human warmth.

Good companion piece to The Old Man and the Sea, by Ernest Hemingway. Old people dealing with the raw power of nature and refusing to accept mortality even after loss of physical strength.

40. Bellow, Saul. Mr. Sammler's Planet. New York: The Viking Press, 1970.

Novel. Mortality, growth, continuity.

Seventy-year-old Pole, living in New York City in the 1960s, recalls German concentration camp experiences and thinks about H.G. Wells, about whom he is writing a book. He is confidant of a group of younger family members, all of whom he describes in earthy, sexual terms. He is genuinely concerned with their well-being, although their confused lives perplex him. His age "shows" very much in a society that glorifies youthful sexuality, but he displays a gift for taking action, thus making a real difference for those he loves, particularly his dying middle-aged nephew.

Bellow, Saul. Seize the Day.

Novel. Mortality, lack of growth in older man.

See Entry 19 in MIDDLE AGE section.

41. Cather, Willa. "Neighbor Rosicky." In Obscure Destinies. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1932.

Short story. Continuity, mortality.

Down-to-earth, elderly immigrant farmer learns that he has heart trouble; he dies soon afterward. Seen alternately through the eyes of his doctor, wife, and children, his character retains the liveliness and warmth that have helped him throughout life. Just after learning that his young daughter-in-law is expecting a child, he dies the way he has lived, quietly and with dignity. Continuity of one's personality from youth into old age; continuity of a man's memory in a new generation.

Companion piece to Seize the Day, by Saul Bellow. Contrasting father-and-son relationships.

42. Cheever, John. "The World of Apples." In The World of Apples. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1961.

Short story. Growth, continuity.

Affirmation of the possibility of joy in old age. Poet living in an Italian hill town is obsessed with preserving and exercising his memory, believing that it contains his poetry and his answers. But one day, after accidentally seeing a couple make love in a forest, he becomes obsessed with obscene imaginings. While on a pilgrimage to the "sacred angel" of Monte Giordano, known as the cleanser of thoughts, he sees a waterfall and remembers the image of his own father as an old man bathing in the cold pool of a waterfall. He does as his father did, and returns to himself. Because he takes positive action, he moves out of despair and into integrity and joy. And, recognizing that his father gave him the gift of that memory of sensual pleasure, he reaffirms the notion that in his own memory reside his poetry and his salvation.

Companion piece to "In Retirement," by Bernard Malamud (Entry 47). In old age, sexual desire revitalizes one man and tortures another; one man is ruined by it and the other conquers it.

43. Deutsch, Babette. "Old Women." In Lyell, Ruth Granetz, ed., Middle Age, Old Age. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1980.

Poem. Mortality, continuity.

Sense of stillness and wonder in old women who sit in doorways mending their memories. They are reminded of their youth when they see a woman with child, smell the earth, or hear a train. The bedsheets they "fumble" symbolize marriage, childbirth, and now impending death. They empathize with the young, who one day will also be old, and they can hardly believe that their own youth has passed.

Good companion piece to "Tom Beatty," by Edgar Lee Masters. The word, "fumble" in the context of old people dealing with their own mortality, has different meanings in the two poems. Contrasting views on the role of the old.

44. Hemingway, Ernest. The Old Man and the Sea. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952.

Novel. Continuity, mortality.

Old fisherman endures intense battle with an enormous fish. Refusing to give in to exhaustion, he uses the code of a lifetime's work on the sea to bring the fish to shore. The next day he drinks coffee with a young friend and makes plans to go out to sea again, this time with the boy. The old man's will remains strong even though he has lost physical strength.

Good companion piece to "A Visit of Charity," by Eudora Welty. Contrasting accounts of young people's encounters with the very old; institutional versus independent living.

Companion piece to "Leaving the Yellow House," by Saul Bellow. See Entry 39.

Hughes, Langston. "Young Gal's Blues."

Poem. Mortality.

See Entry 10 in YOUTH section.

45. Jewett, Sara Orne. "The Foreigner." In The Country of the Pointed Firs, and Other Stories. New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1896.

Short story. Continuity.

An elderly Maine woman tells her visitor the story of a "foreign" woman who died of a broken heart many years ago when her husband was lost at sea. The tradition of story-telling insures the continuity of the foreigner's memory, the tale itself, and New England values; it also seals a friendship between teller and listener.

46. Lardner, Ring. "The Golden Honeymoon." In How to Write Short Stories. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922.

Short story. Continuity.

Snapshot of a lifeless but enduring marriage. In tedious, sing-songy detail, the husband tells the story of his 50th anniversary trip to Florida. During the trip, the couple meet and play cards with the wife's ex-boyfriend, and the two men develop a competitive relationship that ends in an argument. Husband and wife make up on a park bench, reassuring each other that they are glad they married.

47. Malamud, Bernard. "In Retirement." In Rembrandt's Hat. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1973.

Short story. Mortality.

Retired doctor fantasizes an affair with a young woman who lives in his apartment building, and musters the courage to write her a letter. When she tears it up and throws the pieces at him in the lobby, it is as if his age and mortality are suddenly thrust at him. The vitality he felt in reawakened desire is transformed into despair.

Companion piece to "The World of Apples," by John Cheever (Entry 42).

Companion piece to The Second Coming, by Walker Percy (Entry 52).

48. Masters, Edgar Lee. "Tom Beatty." In Spoon River Anthology. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1915.

Poem. Mortality.

Harsh, cold message spoken from the grave by a former poker player who claims that life is a superior gambler who gives us only seventy years to play. The narrator preaches that to accept our losses and our mortality is preferable to pretending that we are immortal. He admonishes us as players to "get out of the room" when our time is up, and not to "fumble the cards, . . .whining to try and try."

Good companion piece to "Old Women," by Babette Deutsch (Entry 43).

Miller, Jason. That Championship Season.

Play. Mortality, lack of growth.

See Entry 26, in MIDDLE AGE section.

49. Oates, Joyce Carol. "Swamps." In By the North Gate. New York: The Vanguard Press, 1963.

Short story. Growth.

Capacity for action, faith, and change in an old man. Rugged, courageous man, living alone in a forest cabin near his family, delivers the baby of a young, crazy-looking woman. The next day, his family finds him unconscious; the baby has been drowned. The old man's repetition of the flat statement, "'They robbed me,'" reveals his capacity for both trust and disillusionment and contrasts sharply with the ready cynicism of younger family members.

50. O'Hara, John. "Over the River and Through the Wood." In Doctor's Son, and Other Stories. New York: Harcourt, 1935.

Short story. Mortality.

Old man's optimistic view of young people is thwarted by their contempt for him. Central character rides to his daughter's country house together with his granddaughter and her two friends. They ignore him during the trip, but after they arrive the granddaughter sends hot chocolate to his room with two cups. Thinking one of the girls may enjoy the hot drink, he opens her door and catches her almost nude. She calls him a dirty old man.

51. Olsen, Tillie. "Tell Me A Riddle." In Tell Me A Riddle. New York: Delacorte Press, 1960.

Novella. Mortality, continuity.

Chronicle of an elderly Jewish woman's death. After 47 years of quarrelsome marriage, the husband struggles through the agony of his wife's dying from cancer. Their children, helpless, see that it is too late for them to ask their mother what she has learned and what they should know about living. The dying woman first shuts out and then welcomes back her family and old memories, and an adult granddaughter finally helps her to die by listening to her talk about her Russian girlhood. Olsen powerfully portrays the process of dying and the intensifying effect it has on the love between husband and wife.

52. Percy, Walker. The Second Coming New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980.

Novel. Growth.

Humorous, tender, and somewhat far-fetched love story about a retired lawyer and a young woman. Their success as a couple hinges upon her staying out of a mental hospital and his staying out of a nursing home. Novel ends as he puts into action a heroic plan for his own return to lawyering, for her setting up a greenhouse business, and for their marrying. Themes: importance of free will in face of society's pressure to render an older man dependent; initiation of a new, genuine, and permanent love relationship after age 60 in spite of society's and family's disapproval.

Good companion piece to "In Retirement," by Bernard Malamud (Entry 47). Two retired professional men experience the rebirth of love and sensuality. One fails; the other may succeed.

53. Porter, Katherine Anne. "The Old Order." In The Old Order. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958.

Short story. Continuity, growth.

Patchwork reminiscence of two elderly Southern women: a white mistress and her black servant. The white woman's father bought the black woman for her as a slave when both were small children; in growing up and growing old, the two women have become friends and have shown both firmness of character and ability to learn and change. Interracial bond reflects their having witnessed the same events and having survived similar hardships.

Good companion piece for "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," also by Porter (Entry 13). Continuity of character traits from one generation to the next.

54. Robinson, Edwin Arlington. "Isaac and Archibald." In Captain Craig. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902.

Poem. Mortality, continuity.

Two old men befriend a 12-year-old boy one hot August day; he remembers them and the day much later with fondness, humor, and respect. After a long walk in the sun, the boy and one of the old men arrive at the home of the other, where the boy listens to their stories and watches them drink cider and play cards. One of the old men tells the boy to think of him "[j]ust as I was to-day" after he dies, and to keep his eye on the light that is life. The boy is richer for his friendship with these men, and he concludes that even if he laughed at them it was all right because he really knew them.

Steinbeck, John. The Red Pony.

Novella in four parts. Growth, mortality, continuity.

See Entry 16, in YOUTH section.

Updike, John. Of the Farm.

Novel. Mortality, continuity.

See Entry 33, in MIDDLE AGE section.

55. Welty, Eudora. "A Visit of Charity." In A Curtain of Green. New York: Doubleday, 1941.

Short story. Mortality.

Horror of institutionalization and what it does to the old. Campfire girl visits two women in a nursing home in order to earn badge points. The two residents, completely estranged from the outside world, are grotesque even to each other: one is aggressive and screechy, the other bed-ridden and grumpy. Although the gap is bridged for an instant when the girl wonders intensely about one

of the women, the visit creates more fear in her than sympathy or understanding, and she runs out of the home in terror, glad to re-enter the active world.

Good companion piece to The Old Man and the Sea, by Ernest Hemingway (Entry 44).

56. Williams, William Carlos. "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower." In Journey to Love. New York: Random House, 1954.

Poem. Mortality, continuity, growth.

Poet asserts the possibility of renewing marriage in old age. He asks his wife's forgiveness for a lifetime of sins, and he recalls sensuous images that represent his love for her. Because life appears infinitely precious in the face of mortality, writing this poem becomes both necessary and possible. In his last years, the poet recognizes the brevity of life and the necessity for continuing to create—by loving and writing.

57. Williams, William Carlos. "To Waken an Old Lady." In Sour Grapes, 1921. (Also in The Collected Earlier Poems of William Carlos Williams. New York: New Directions Pub. Co., 1938.)

Poem. Continuity.

Flight of birds in winter used as metaphor for old age. The birds' "shrill piping of plenty" may indicate the rejoicing of the old that their life continues, sustained even in the apparent bleakness of winter.

IV. OBSERVATIONS ON TEACHING THE LIFE CYCLE THEME IN FRESHMAN ENGLISH CLASSES

Background

As I noted in the introduction, this bibliography is an outgrowth of a freshman English course I taught at Lehigh University in the spring, 1981. Part of a research project entitled "The Graying of the College Classroom," my two classes were essentially the same as all the other freshman composition and literature classes except for two things: first, I used the life cycle as a central theme in selecting literature and for designing discussion and writing topics, and second, one of these two classes was composed of an approximately even mix of regular (18- and 19-year-old) freshmen and older students (60 years of age and older). All the students took the course for credit and were required to complete the same work. The abstract of the research report is shown in Appendix A, the course syllabus in Appendix B.

The primary purpose of the course was to teach students to write better; the second important focus was on learning to read and appreciate literature representing a variety of genres: the short story, the novel, drama, and poetry. I used discussion as the primary teaching method, although I also lectured and sometimes required in-class writing. The same syllabus applied to both classes; it includes literature that illuminates three elements of the aging process: growth, mortality, and continuity.

Although the experimental results are described fully in the final report of the project, I feel it is also worth while to share some of my observations on teaching the life cycle theme itself and on using this theme with both an intergenerational and an all-freshman class. The life cycle theme opened up some extremely fruitful discussions in both sections and seems to have given both younger and older students rich material to use in their written work. And, although the intergenerational class had somewhat livelier discussions (see

abstract), some of which I describe later in this chapter, students in both classes responded with great sensitivity to discussion and writing assignments in which I asked them to address the aging process and old age.

Selection of Material

In order to deal with growth, I selected literature that illuminates those crisis points at which characters awaken to a particular reality that disturbs their previously comfortable state of mind, forcing them to face a new phase of life. Such crisis points occur throughout the life cycle, bringing with them important changes that signify aging. Florida Scott-Maxwell describes this part of the aging process very well in the lines quoted in the frontispiece of this book. Some of the works that focus on shattering experiences signaling the kind of growth Scott-Maxwell writes about are "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," by Katherine Anne Porter, "The Sorrows of Gin," by John Cheever, The Moviegoer, by Walker Percy, "The Ice Palace," by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and "Swamps," by Joyce Carol Oates. In these pieces, young, middle-aged, and elderly characters grow and age in some way as a result of coping with crisis.

Other literature examines the implications of human mortality. Frequently, a particular occurrence such as a birthday or reunion, the death of a family member, or simply the way someone looks at a character brings on an acute awareness of the brevity of life. Though a keen sense of mortality often elicits strong negative responses, characters often find life sweeter when they awaken to its limitations. Works that focus on mortality include A Streetcar Named Desire, by Tennessee Williams, That Championship Season, by Jason Miller, A Death in the Family, by James Agee, "Tell Me A Riddle," by Tillie Olson, and "Neighbor Rosicky," by Willa Cather.

The continuity of the unique central consciousness of individuals serves as a source of strength for characters who experience change, growth, and a sense of their own mortality. As Scott-Maxwell (1979) wrote at the age of 85, "I am myself as never before. . . ."[1] In order

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[1] Florida Scott-Maxwell, The Measure of My Days. New York: Penguin Books, 1979, p. 19.

to help students appreciate this aspect of aging, works of literature were included that illuminate characters' recognition (or lack of recognition) of continuity. Such insight often occurs when characters see themselves in other generations, as illustrated in these lines by May Sarton (See Entry 28).

> I live like a baby
> Who bursts into laughter
> At a sunbeam on the wall,
> Or like a very old woman
> Entranced by the prick of stars
> Through the leaves.

In this poem, the speaker acknowledges her infancy and her old age while remaining the same person, one who seeks light in a unique way. She clearly recognizes continuity within her own aging experience.

In all the works listed above, the central characters who undergo changes retain their integrity because of their strong inner core. The continuity of their own special consciousness actually makes successful change possible and sustains them when change is for the worse. Some works, on the other hand, point to the importance people attach to continuity found in the recognition of one person's central consciousness by someone else. This kind of recognition can counterbalance the fact of mortality, making it possible for a character to survive in the memory of another, or giving an older character the reassurance that something he knows personally will live on in a younger person. Works that focus particularly on continuity include, for example, Katherine Anne Porter's "Old Mortality," Sarah Orne Jewett's "The Foreigner," and Saul Bellow's Mr. Sammler's Planet.

The course dealt with these three inherent parts of aging--growth, mortality and continuity--at all stages of life--youth, middle age, and later adulthood. While each piece of literature developed at least one of these three themes, and while I pointed them out and often directed the class discussion to illuminate one of them, I made no attempt to teach about "aging" as such. The course might be classified as a very indirect approach to the subject of aging, in that the literature was allowed to speak for itself and the students to respond from their own experience and emotions. I did not use any piece of literature as an "illustration" of what getting older is all about.

I did, however, try to avoid using literature that stereotyped age groups. For example, in the latter third of the semester the classes read Seize the Day, by Saul Bellow, in which a stern elderly physician reprimands his son for not pulling his life together. They also read "Neighbor Rosicky," by Willa Cather, a story that depicts a warm relationship between a farmer and his adult sons. They read "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," by William Carlos Williams, a poem in which the author, in his late years and sensing his own mortality, pleads with his wife to forgive him his many sins and to renew the love they had when they first married.

Because so much literature about older people deals with physical and mental decline, I thought it was important to find literature that gave a more balanced picture, and especially to bring out in discussion the growth of character and the continuity of the central core of a person in the face of mortality. On one occasion a professor visited both classes to read poetry about growing older. He chose well-known poems that depicted nearly every negative stereotype of old age--loneliness, false moral superiority, foolishness, weakness, decline of both mental and physical capacities, and deep depression. While the older students in the intergenerational class challenged the negative view of aging, the students in the all-freshman class were not in a position to contradict the words of the poets. If I had not made a point of asking about their emotional responses to the poetry and then discussing stereotypes, they might have simply taken the poetry at face value.

The visiting professor's selection represents the kind of literature people often think of when they think of "aging in literature." When an older student asked the professor why the view was so negative, his very sensible response was that most of the poets wrote these works when they were young and did not know better. They were, themselves, afraid of growing old.

The circle is a vicious one. Because people associate aging with decline, this sort of literature simply reinforces their feeling. And because great literature is "untouchable" to many people, it serves to

perpetuate stereotypes. For example, when I asked people for suggestions of works that deal well with the subject of aging, many responded, "Try Willy Loman, of Miller's Death of a Salesman." Willy Loman is thought of as the epitome of the aging man--pathetic, lonely, lacking self-respect, fearful of retirement, a man with no future. But Willy Loman no more represents aging than he does youth. He is pathetic because of who he is, not because of the time of his life. Of course, the time Miller selects to show us this man is important because it is at this stage of life that Loman reveals his true self most poignantly. The mask falls off and we see him as he is. I resisted using this play, however, because Loman fits too well into the stereotype people like to believe, and a lazy reading of the play can simply reinforce the negative view.

So, while this was not a course on "aging," I did make an attempt to give students a broad selection of perspectives on people of all age groups, based upon the conviction that all three phenomena--growth, mortality, and continuity--are important at all stages of life. The stereotypical view is that growth occurs only in youth, that continuity of what one has "grown into" is to be expected throughout middle age, and that mortality is the chief concern of the elderly. Because writers are often imprisoned by these misconceptions until they themselves reach old age, literature reflects the stereotypes; it is difficult but important, therefore, to locate works of literature that represent a good cross-section of views.

Discussions of Literature in the Intergenerational Class

Our experimental results showed that the amount of activity--participation, whispering, and laughter--was greater in the intergenerational class than in the all-freshman group. Throughout the semester, observer Judith Aronson and I also noticed that the mixed class seemed to bring out a greater number of ideas about each piece of literature than did the all-freshman class. Sometimes a topic that stirred controversy in the mixed class was ignored in the all-freshman

group; disagreements over interpretations seemed to be more prevalent in the intergenerational class. The all-freshman class responded very well to my probes when I wanted students to elaborate, but in the intergenerational class a certain spontaneity appeared to help students bring forth more of their own ideas.

By counting the numbers of ideas that emanated from discussions in the intergenerational and all-freshman classes, we hoped to learn whether students in the intergenerational class actually brought out more ideas in their discussions about literature than did students in the all-freshman class. We chose for analysis four corresponding discussions from both classes, transcribed from tape recordings. All four were standard teacher-led discussions; for each discussion the typed transcriptions from both classes were of approximately the same length. (We did not analyze class sessions on William Carlos Williams's "Asphodel" and Willa Cather's "Neighbor Rosicky" because the typed transcriptions from the intergenerational class were much longer that the corresponding transcriptions from the all-freshman class.)

In order to "count" ideas in any given discussion, we recorded in an appropriate category each comment that could be distinguished as a single, new idea. Some students' responses contained more than one idea and thus were categorized in more than one list. After we had categorized the comments from both groups in this way, we counted the ideas unique to one or the other group. We found that in three out of four corresponding sessions a greater variety of ideas was expressed in the intergenerational class than in the all-freshman class. The table in Appendix C shows tallies for the four discussions.

Over the past two years, while planning and carrying out this study, my colleagues and I have discussed the concept of intergenerational learning with many people both on and off campus. A number of concerns have been raised about the effect older students might have on the quality of class discussions. I have listed some of these concerns here, following them by a response based on my own experiences:

(a) Older students will take over, talk too much about their own experiences, and either bore everybody or get the class off the subject.

This was perhaps the most commonly expressed concern among people with whom we discussed the project. In order to determine whether the older students in the intergenerational class did in fact "take over," we compared the per-student per-day participation rates of younger students in the two experimental classes and found that they did not differ statistically. Thus, experimental data support our observation that this much-feared phenomenon did not occur.

Howard Y. McClusky presents the older learner's experience as a unique opportunity for the teacher. He says, "to date, educators have not been very creative in finding ways to use the student's own life experience to enhance the learning process. . . .We have yet to discover ways of integrating the rich life experience of older people into the classroom, of tying the lessons of experience to the conceptual structure of subject matter, instead of sacrificing one to the other."[2] I found that the experiences of older students could be effectively used to help bring out the essence of a work of literature.

Rather than worrying about the older students' experiences boring the class, I tried to use their comments and anecdotes to help drive certain points home, open up discussion for students of both age groups, and bring some humor into the classroom. By the fourth class session, for example, several older students were expressing their ideas about the literature in terms of their own experiences, often saying that they had known "people like that" (characters in literature). When one older man said, concerning one character's expectations of the future, "Life doesn't operate that way," I answered, "You can vouch for that." The class had a comfortable, friendly laugh about this, and the ice was broken concerning the simple fact that some of the students were older persons.

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[2] Howard Y. McClusky, "The Community of Generations: A Goal and a Context for the Education of Persons in the Later Years." In R.H. Sherron and D.B. Lumsden, eds., Introduction to Educational Gerontology. Washington, D.C.: Hemisphere, 1978.

Excellent insights sometimes came from older students' comparisons between fictional situations and their own experiences, and younger students in the class quickly picked up the technique. In a discussion about Sherwood Anderson's story, "Departure" (from Winesburg, Ohio), the class discussed the lack of sentimentality in the author's portrayal of the departure scene. One older man, showing his appreciation for the difficulty small-town people often have in expressing emotion, said,

> It's true to life. Man is always afraid to show his emotions. The drunk, the old lady, they're afraid to open up. I've lived long enough to see—we don't like to tell a man we love him.

Later in the same discussion, we talked about the thoughts of character George when he sits on the train just before the departure, and a younger student said, "It seems that even in my own experience when you are removed from something, you think about the little things you didn't think about before." This young man's use of "even in my own experience" seems to indicate that he was attempting to draw on his experience as a follow-up to the older man's comment. Both comments were helpful and led to my pointing out Anderson's uncanny ability to create a brief span of time in a character's life without overdrawn, sentimental verbiage, as well as his amazing ability to show the reader in a new light things he already knows.

The older students' comments on growing older were particularly useful in class discussion. When discussing William Carlos Williams's poem, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," I asked whether or not Williams could have written this poem if he had expected to live forever. An older man answered,

> When you are in your youth you have eons of time, but when you're up in years you know you have to get every moment out of the day because you don't know if you have tomorrow. You savor with a different taste bud.

Because the all-freshman class had brought up the question of Williams's promiscuity (one young student in that class particularly objecting to the poem on that basis), I asked the students in the intergenerational class whether or not they would forgive Williams if they were in his

wife's shoes. An older woman answered, "I think the longer you live the more tolerant you become, and I think it is much easier the older you become. His wife could have forgiven him if she was as old as he was." Later, when a younger student said, "This is his second chance; he is never going to ask for a fifth or sixth chance," an older man said, "You're wrong," and the class laughed. The man responded, smiling, "That's the years talking." The class could share an insight about the increased ability of people to understand and forgive each other as they grow older at the same time that younger and older students acknowledged their age difference.

On several occasions, older students disagreed with each other in their interpretations of a work of literature because of their very different past experiences. I encouraged debate. But when two people disagreed on the basis of experience only, I also used the opportunity to point out the danger of biasing the reading of a work by interpreting everything only in terms of one's own thinking. Such occasions provided illustrations of the need to go back to the text to see just exactly what the author had written. For example, during a class session on Saul Bellow's novel, Seize the Day, some discussion revolved around the father-son relationship and the character Wilky's reflections on his father's mortality. In response to a question from a younger student, two of the older woman made statements about their own anticipation of death: one felt strongly that when one grows older one wants to be prepared in every sense, and the other denied ever thinking about death. In order to make use of these comments while staying with the subject, I asked the class to consider Bellow's portrayal of the character Dr. Adler: was he preparing for death? If so, how?

In a like situation, when discussing just how realistic was the use of obscene language in Jason Miller's play, That Championship Season, the older students were split in their opinions. Three felt strongly that people in their forties just "weren't like that," and three others spoke up in defense of the playwright's ability to portray a drinking scene as it really is. Most of the younger students seemed to feel the language was completely realistic. Had there not been such strong

disagreement, the ensuing exploration of why Miller portrays the characters as foul-mouthed, overgrown boys would probably not have been as engrossing for any of the students in the class. As it was, the class shared a sense of mission: to justify this particular writer's use of language. (Since the young students in the all-freshman class had barely noticed that the language was rough, their discussion of Miller's use of language lacked the same intensity.)

> (b) Younger and older students will have an awfully hard time opening up in front of each other. They'll be afraid to disagree with each other because they'll feel they have to be polite.

This simply was not a problem. Students were not only encouraged to express their own views of the literature but also to examine each other's view critically. As noted above, the older students openly disagreed with each other from the start. They also showed no hesitation to express their positive and negative feelings toward the literature. And, by the seventh class session, a younger student spoke out in defense of the poet Williams, disagreeing with the older man sitting next to him, who had been criticizing the poet's apparent lack of form. Two other older students also expressed appreciation of the poem, making excellent points about the use of language and changes in tone. After this class session, two older men who had at first reacted extremely negatively to the poem talked to me. One said that he had unfortunately gotten into the habit of "not reading, but rereading," and that he was beginning to recognize the value of "getting into new things." The other, whose opinion had been challenged by his young neighbor, said that the discussion had "opened up" the poem for him.

As the semester progressed, younger and older students were able to disagree with each other without animosity, and, in fact, often with humor. During the discussion on Jason Miller's That Championship Season, one young man introduced a healthy climate for discussion by saying he "strongly" disagreed with one older man's opinion about the use of bad language in the play. He backed up his comment by relating a personal experience of his own. Another young man then disagreed with

the same older student, saying, "A point that Joe made, about not living in the past every day but only living in the past for this reunion, I disagree with that totally." A third younger student then added that the play "wouldn't be real at all if they didn't use strong language." The older man who had been challenged then asked for opinions of the women in the class, and one woman said, "I thought the vulgarity made it more realistic--they were immature people trying to go back to their past." On another occasion, when one of the older women made a strong comment on Blanche in Tennessee Williams's play, A Streetcar Named Desire, a younger student challenged her by asking, "What exactly do you mean by that?"

Open disagreement was also evident in a discussion of Walker Percy's novel, The Moviegoer, in which some students--young and old--felt that the main character, Binx, was unable to love, and others --young and older--disagreed strongly. Several students in both age groups were adamant about their interpretations, certainly not hesitating to express them just because of differences in age. In fact, one older woman, who took the position that Binx was a "sex maniac," received both amused and serious challenges from the younger as well as the older students.

The older students' openness in expressing opinions was sometimes helpful, sometimes not. But ultimately it seemed to help the younger students to open up and talk more freely; on balance, the discussions were richer because of it. As Moody writes,

> Everyone, including old people, tends to be dogmatic when speaking from experience. On the other hand, we are all aware of the older person who becomes subservient to "the professor" by casting teachers in the role of people who know all the answers, all the facts. Let us admit as well that many faculty members are comfortable in this superior role.[3]

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[3] Harry R. Moody, "Education and the Life Cycle: A Philosophy of Aging." In R.H. Sherron and D.B. Lumsden, eds., Introduction to Educational Gerontology. Washington, D.C., Hemisphere, 1978.

Such a role is surely easier to play in a class of 18- and 19-year-old college freshmen than in a mixed class. When teaching this mixed group, my objective was to be on the alert for the kind of dogmatism Moody mentions but not to be afraid of it. When a student's opinion needed challenging, whether the student was young or old, I challenged. And the students challenged each other.

The students' openness was also evident in the humor in this class, as shown in the difference in amounts of laughter in the intergenerational and all-freshman classes. Again, although the younger students were a good-natured group by themselves, the older students' ability to "speak their piece" without awkwardness seemed to loosen up the whole group. One man in particular almost always had something amusing to say about the literature. He commented that William Carlos Williams's typewriter must have gotten broken and that one of the poets Williams mentions "was in jail all his life along with the criminals." While such comments may not meet with every professor's approval in terms of literary criticism, they did a great deal for this class because they made it "okay" not to "like" every work of literature. When I asked why George Willard, in Anderson's "Departure," did not say goodbye to his girl friend Helen, this same student said, "He owed her money." The entire class roared with laughter. Later, in the discussion of <u>That Championship Season</u>, when one of the older students said that the drinking scene was realistically portrayed, adding, "The restraints are gone and the polish is gone," a young woman in the class was able to retort, "I don't think they <u>had</u> much polish." Again, the class laughed.

In small group discussions a younger person sometimes was the only young student in a group with four older students, and vice versa. Such group make-up never seemed to stymie conversation. In fact, often a quiet student who seldom opened up in large class discussions would be found talking avidly to a small audience of persons of another age group. And alignments certianly did not break along age lines. For example, I once noticed a younger woman and an older woman eyeing each other in amusement over something a young man said in a small group

discussion. Several friendships blossomed in the class between young and old, two of them between older women and the young men who sat beside them. The comfortable relationship young and old felt with each other might best be illustrated in an episode toward the end of the semester when a young man said about the grandmother in Katherine Anne Porter's "The Old Order": "She's a stubborn old lady. She doesn't give up." Everyone, especially the older man sitting beside him, laughed out loud.

(c) Older people get too emotional and have a hard time looking at the material objectively.

Several older students displayed negative emotional responses to some of the literature, but no more than their counterparts in the all-freshman group. The strong emotional reactions of a few older students against certain characters in Percy's The Moviegoer and Miller's That Championship Season might be compared with those of younger students in the all-freshman group against the poet Williams in "Asphodel" and the character Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire. In these cases, students allowed their personal reactions to get in the way of objective consideration of the works, and I had to counter with questions directed at a more critical view of the literature at hand.

I usually felt that the class was better off if students expressed an emotional reaction than if they had no response at all. I could probe these emotional responses, and a productive discussion usually resulted. On balance, the older students' relative sense of freedom to express personal feelings created an atmosphere of honesty in which all the students, young and old, were free to say what they thought, without worrying about whether or not I agreed with them.

Writing Assignments

Because the main purpose of English 2 was to teach writing skills rather than either literary criticism or the subject of aging, I tried to give writing assignments that would stimulate creative thinking and

allow students to draw on their own experience, so that they could write with interest and conviction. The life cycle theme lent itself beautifully to the creation of essay topics; writing out assignments was a pleasurable task for me. Over the course of the semester, students told me that they actually enjoyed tackling some of these topics. The five essay assignments are shown in Appendix D, and examination questions are given in Appendix E.

The students in both sections showed considerable sensitivity toward aging in their written work on two particular assignments: the final essay (#5) and a less formal, in-class, group assignment they worked on at the end of the semester. Essay 5 required students to compare themselves in their later years (or an older person they knew well) with an older character in one of the works they had read for class.[4] The in-class assignment called for small groups of students to discuss one of five mimeographed quotations on aging and to write a paragraph representing their group's thoughts. I have reprinted these quotations and the students' paragraphs in Appendix F. All of the paragraphs were written by younger students who served as group recorders for this particular assignment.

Taken as a group, the final essays present an interesting and fairly well-balanced view of old age. The life cycle theme seems to have helped students find the essence of the aging experience not only in the literature but also in their own experience and imagination. They wrote about many elements of the aging experience, including all three major subthemes--growth, mortality and continuity. The most interesting papers are those in which students describe themselves rather than another person. I quote from some of them here.

Two young men in the all-freshman class identify two serious problems the old have to deal with: boredom and frustration. One, describing himself as a 65-year-old government retiree, humorously tells about his daily walk with his friend Jake:

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[4] Essay assignments for the two classes are shown in Appendix D; Midterm and final examination questions are shown in Appendix E.

> Today Jake and I are going to walk to the park. Since the sun is very bright this morning, I suggest we walk by the river and enjoy nature, but Jake insists on the park. He likes to watch the girls on warm days. I think he is becoming a dirty old man. I don't mind going to the park though, because I get a kick out of talking to the teen-agers. It reminds me of when I was young and talked to the old men in the park. The shoe is on the other foot now, but I really don't mind. I suppose you can say it is my duty to sit on a park bench and act my age.

The same writer concludes his essay with a note of cautious optimism:

> Although the day was not a total waste of time I am afraid that as time goes on I may get tired of these walks. I am also afraid of winter and of being cooped up in the house for four months. I believe my fight against depression and boredom will be hard, but I think I can come out on top if I keep myself busy and can stay healthy.

The other young man says that at 69 he looks 85 because he worries so much about the world in its present state--one in which computerized learning and mechanical sex are the norm. He says:

> With the way the world has changed, the only things left from my past are my memories and my routine of going out Friday nights. . . .Now I go out to see a basketball or hockey game in the winter and a baseball game in the summer. It allows my to get rid of the emotions I held in during the week and think about my life.

A young woman from the same class takes a more optimistic position on old age: "I view old age as a period of polishing and refining, and I think it is an important stage. . . ." She says that by taking her grandchildren on trips she can "appreciate youth without living in the past":

> Watching the children playing in the sand, shivering after swimming lessons, or fishing for sunfish, I remember the simple joys and fears of my childhood and I share in the children's joys as they conquer their fears and accept greater challenges.

But she also has difficulties to conquer:

> Sometimes I am stricken with loneliness when I realize how many of my friends and relatives have been taken by death. No longer working, I have long periods of time during which I must entertain myself. I take this opportunity to relax and develop interests that I previously pushed aside because of lack of time.

One young man, seeing himself as a retired doctor, talks about death:

> I have seen plenty of death in my practice. I thought I could beat it because I have battled against it in my patients. But death always ended up the victor. Death is becoming a reality for me too, now that I'm getting older.

He concludes:

> Think of death as a destiny we all will fulfill. "Miniver coughed and called it fate." It's fate that time will finish, but life is now, and it is for you to mold the way you want it to be.

Two young men from the intergenerational class write about their old age in the context of the way they live other parts of their lives. One, speaking of the value of every moment of life, writes from the present:

> Sometimes I wish I were back in Finland or playing ice hockey in the Capital Center before the Washington Capitols game again; however, I know that I've already enjoyed those moments to their fullest extent and that doing them again would not be the same. . . .The same holds true when I am sixty-five. I will look back and think of all the fantastic times I had in my younger days, but I will not want to relive them.

The other young man portrays himself as a rugged old man living in a stone cabin on a river in Utah:

> When my wife died, I built a home in the desert beside my creek and moved into the wilderness, six miles by jeep from Moab. Now that I'm retired, I spend my time woodworking, walking, thinking, and tending to my small farm. I finally am what I've always wanted to be and I feel so comfortable and content that an hour of walking through my canyons is like a lifetime of happiness.

He claims that unless he had set a course for himself early in life, he would not have found such satisfaction:

> It is sad that so many people trudge through life simply struggling to stay ahead of the payments on the house and car without ever stopping to think if there is any other place they would like to go in life.

Several of the older students in the intergenerational class also set themselves in the context of their past. One woman writes:

> What sort of person am I? I can only say that inside this size 16-1/2 woman with bad feet there is a size 10 brunette with twinkle toes. I still love to dance, especially with good manly support.

Other older students describe the inward satisfaction they feel after a lifetime of struggle. One man writes:

> Many men's lives are spent in the ebb and flow of ambition. One could spend all his years this way and enter the evening of his life complete unaware that success is not necessarily spelled in the objective sense through the recognition of his fellow men but, equally, and sometimes even more, through the inward satisfaction of having lived and partaken of the buffetings of time itself.

Another woman, approaching her seventieth birthday, sees herself as very much the same person she has always been:

> My next birthday I will have reached the biblical age of three score and ten. Such a solemn age. Yet I do not feel solemn, nor do I feel sad that so many of my years are spent. As a matter of fact, I feel much the same as I did as a young woman, very curious about life, about literature, about archeology, about nature.

She, too, feels inward satisfaction: "One thing these later years have brought me is an inner peace." But she recognizes not only that without the struggle there could be no peace, but that the struggle itself is life-giving. Her final paragraph sums up the way growth, mortality, and continuity intertwine to make aging the profound experience it is:

So how can I equate my old age with the gloom of the Jesuit Hopkins? How can I compare the golden days I lived with the futile maundering of Miniver Cheevy or the loner Eban Flood? Only Lucinda Matlock's "It takes life to love life" strikes a tenuous note of empathy. No, I like to think of my life as the good fight well fought to bring peace to a restless spirit. If I had not fought that fight then surely I would not

> "go gently into that good night
> But rage, rage against the lowering of the
> light."

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ABSTRACT

THE GRAYING OF THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM:

IMPACT OF OLDER PEOPLE AS PEERS IN THE CLASSROOM ON ATTITUDES AND ON PERFORMANCE OF UNDERGRADUATES

Report Submitted to the

NRTA-AARP Andrus Foundation

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September 30, 1981

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ABSTRACT

THE GRAYING OF THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM:

Impact of Older People as Peers in the Classroom On Attitudes and on Performance of Undergraduates

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether college freshmen's attitudes and performance would be affected by the presence of older students in the college classroom.

We were specifically concerned, first, with seeing whether the experience of participating in an intergenerational class, in which the life cycle theme was used as an approach to composition and literature, would influence freshmen's attitudes toward their own aging, older people as a group, and intergenerational classes. We also wished to learn whether participation in such a class would affect the older students' attitudes toward intergenerational classes, younger people as a group, and their own capacity for learning in a college environment.

In addition, the study was concerned with learning whether a mixed class composition would affect the amount and type of class activity in a discussion format, and whether younger students' performance on written essays would be affected by their participation in an intergenerational class.

A secondary concern was to determine whether students in an all-freshman class, studying the same subject as the intergenerational class, would exhibit changes in attitude toward their own aging and toward older people as a group.

The study utilized the pretest - treatment - posttest design. Two treatment groups were enrolled separately in two sections of second-semester freshman English: one an intergenerational class composed of fourteen college freshmen and ten non-matriculating, for-credit students 60 years of age and older, and the other a regular all-freshman class. Both sections studied composition and literature, using the life cycle theme as a central approach. The control group consisted of three sections of the same course, all composed of college freshmen, without the superimposition of the life cycle theme.

A Student Opinion Questionnaire containing five separate scales was used to measure attitude changes. The mean amounts of activity (participating, whispering, and laughter) per class period in the two experimental classes were compared to determine whether the two groups would

exhibit differences in these activities. The improvement in performance on essays written by younger students in the intergenerational class was compared with the improvement shown in essays written by students in the all-freshman class to determine whether one class would show more improvement than the other.

Analysis of the data revealed that participation in an intergenerational class, in which the life cycle theme was used as an approach to composition and literature, resulted in younger students' changing their attitudes toward their own aging and toward intergenerational classes. Attitudes moved in a positive direction in both of these dimensions: both changes were statistically significant. The younger students' attitude toward older people as a group, high to begin with, did not change. Older students' already positive attitudes toward intergenerational classes, younger people as a group, and their own capacity for learning in a college environment showed no change.

The rates of participation (talking aloud) and whispering per student per class period were significantly higher in the intergenerational class than in the all-freshman experimental group. The total amount of laughter per class session was also significantly greater. While the older students accounted for the higher level of activity in the mixed class, their active participation did not prevent the younger students in this class from participating at as high a rate per student as their counterparts in the all-freshman experimental group.

A comparison of first and last essays written by the younger students in the two experimental sections shows that both groups exhibited approximately the same degree of improvement from their first to their final essays.

Students in the experimental all-freshman class showed no attitude changes toward either their own aging or older people as a group.

Studying in an intergenerational class benefited younger students in several ways. Their anticipation of aging was modified to the point where they saw themselves in the future as capable, energetic, and admired older people. Their changed attitude toward intergenerational classes indicates that they found sharing the classroom with older students a valuable experience. The significantly greater amount of activity in the intergenerational group is another indicator of a high level of student interest in this class.

The myth that older students may deprive younger students of learning opportunity is rebuked by evidence from this study. Younger students in the intergenerational class participated at as high a rate as their counterparts in the experimental all-freshman class, and they showed at least as much improvement in their written work from the beginning to the end of the semester. The exchange between generations does more than help younger and older students understand each other; it provides a stimulating atmosphere for learning, one in which younger as well as older students benefit.

APPENDIX B

SYLLABUS FOR ENGLISH 2: COMPOSITION AND LITERATURE

Theme: The Life Cycle in 20th-Century American Literature

Department of English
Lehigh University

Spring 1981 — **B. Jensen-Osinski, Instructor**

Session	1	Opening class: Introduction to course	
	2	"The Dogwood Tree: A Boyhood," by John Updike	Norton, pp. 2174-2199
	3	"Old Mortality," by Katherine Anne Porter (Part I)	Porter, pp. 107-137
	4	"Old Mortality" (Parts II & III)	Porter, pp. 138-182
	5	"The Rich Boy," by F. Scott Fitzgerald	Norton, pp. 1618-1648
	6	First essay due; "Departure," by Sherwood Anderson	Norton. pp. 1560-1562
	7	"Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," by William Carlos Williams; May Sarton poem	Both poems on mimeographed sheets to be distributed
	8	Discuss themes; *A Streetcar Named Desire*, by Tennessee Williams	Williams, pp. 13-142
	9	*Streetcar*, continued	
	10	*A Death in the Family*, by James Agee	Agee, pp. 11-318
	11	*A Death in the Family*, continued	
	12	Second essay due; "Separating," by John Updike	Norton, pp. 2199-2208
	13	*That Championship Season*, by Jason Miller	Miller, pp. 3-48

English 2, Syllabus p. 2

Session	14	That Championship Season, continued	
	15	Midterm Examination	
	16	The Moviegoer, by Walker Percy	Percy, pp. 11-191
	17	The Moviegoer, continued	
	18	"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," by T. S. Eliot	Norton, pp. 1219-1223
	19	Third essay due; selections by Florida Scott-Maxwell	On mimeographed sheets to be distributed.
	20	"The Foreigner," by Sarah Orne Jewett	Norton, pp. 524-544
	21	"The Old Order," by Katherine Anne Porter	Porter, pp. 11-33
	22	Seize the Day, by Saul Bellow	Norton, pp. 1953-2031
	23	Seize the Day, continued	
	24	Fourth essay due; "Lucinda Matlock," by Edgar Lee Masters; "Miniver Cheevy" and "Mr. Flood's Party," by E. A. Robinson	Masters on mimeographed sheet; Robinson in Norton, pp. 1087 and 1097-1098
	25	"Neighbour Rosicky," by Willa Cather	Norton, pp. 1491-1516
	26	"The Source," by Katherine Anne Porter	Porter, pp. 3-10
	27	Final essay due; read selections by Florida Scott-Maxwell and poem by May Sarton	On mimeographed sheets
	28	Review and revise final essays in class	

English 2 Syllabus, p. 3

Texts for Course:

The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol. 2, Gottesman, et al. eds. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1979.

Agee, James. A Death in the Family. New York: Bantam, 1971.

Miller, Jason. That Championship Season. New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1972.

Percy, Walker. The Moviegoer. New York: Avon, 1980.

Porter, Katherine Anne. The Old Order: Stories of the South from Flowering Judas, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, and The Leaning Tower. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955.

Williams, Tennessee. A Streetcar Named Desire. New York: Signet, 1973.

APPENDIX C

NUMBERS OF IDEAS EXPRESSED IN DISCUSSIONS OF FOUR WORKS OF LITERATURE IN TWO EXPERIMENTAL CLASSES

Numbers of ideas expressed only by the intergenerational class	Numbers of same ideas expressed by both classes	Numbers of ideas expressed only by all-freshman class
	That Championship Season, by Jason Miller	
48	20	34
	A Death in the Family, by James Agee	
53	21	29
	Seize the Day, by Saul Bellow	
30	19	22
	A Streetcar Named Desire, by Tennessee Williams	
21	35	30

Note: This table is taken from the final report, *The Graying of the College Classroom: Impact of Older People as Peers in the Classroom on Attitudes and on Performance of Undergraduates*, by Barbara H. Jensen-Osinski, Peter G. Beidler, Edwin J. Kay, and Judith L. Arson, Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University, 1981.

APPENDIX D

ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS GIVEN TO TWO FRESHMAN ENGLISH CLASSES STUDYING THE LIFE CYCLE THEME

FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

English 2, Sections A & D
Lehigh University

B. Jensen-Osinski, Instructor
Spring, 1981

Miranda, in Katherine Anne Porter's story, "Old Mortality," had several experiences that changed her perceptions of herself, her family, and life around her. For example, the sight of the race horse, Miss Lucy, bleeding, trembling, and breathing hard, changed Miranda's idea of what winning was all about and erased all her former interest in becoming a jockey. We have discussed other incidents from this story in class.

In a two-and-a-half-page essay, compare one of Miranda's experiences to one of your own. Imagine that you are writing an article for publication in a parents' magazine or a psychological journal for the general public.

To complete the assignment, first select one event from the story. Select an event that you feel caused Miranda to change. Explain in what way(s), she changed, in what way(s) she remained the same, and why you think so. Be sure to back up your arguments with illustrations from the story itself. If you quote lines directly from the text, simply give the page number(s) in parentheses after the quotation. This part of the paper should take two full paragraphs.

Second, briefly describe an event from your own past that caused you to change in some way. Explain in what way(s) you changed as a result of this incident, and in what way(s) you remained the same. This part of the paper should also comprise two paragraphs.

Last, write one or two concluding paragraphs, explaining how your personal experience was either different from or similar to Miranda's. The stand you take here will become your major thesis. Make sure your conclusion makes sense in light of what you have said in the first four paragraphs. If you are successful, the first two "parts" of your paper will lead up to and support the conclusion.

ESSAY #2 ASSIGNMENT

English 2, Sections A & D
Lehigh University

B. Jensen-Osinski, Instructor
Spring, 1981

In James Agee's novel, A Death in the Family, many different forces worked on 6-year-old Rufus. Among them, we might list the following:

- Loving companionship and trust of his father, Jay;
- Piety and quiet authority of his mother, Mary;
- Common-sense confidence of his Aunt Hannah;
- Teasing by the older boys who passed his home on their way to school;
- A combination of cynicism and wonder about God, and a new sort of companionship from Uncle Andrew;
- Guilt about the way he treated his sister, Catherine;
- An intense moment of recognition between Rufus and his great-great-grandmother;
- The confusing variety of explanations about his father's death by Mary, Hannah, the older boys, and Andrew.

Select one or two forces that you think were particularly important in Rufus' early development. In a two-and-a-half-page essay, show how Rufus was affected by these forces in the forms of people and events, and explain how you think Rufus will be successful or unsuccessful in resolving the resulting conflicts as he grows older.

Be sure to base your assertions on what you have read in the novel. DO NOT GENERALIZE ABOUT THE WAY PEOPLE USUALLY REACT OR BEHAVE IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES. Talk about Rufus, and cite from the book to prove your points.

The above list is not complete, and it does not cover all the complex effects each of these characters had on Rufus. None of the characters named in the list produced just one simple effect. For example, as we have discussed in class, one evening out at the movies with Jay produced a variety of emotions in the little boy. If you choose to write about Jay's effect on Rufus, it might be best not to try to discuss any other major characters' effects on him. If you think you can do so, by all means try, but remember that the more you narrow your subject, the more thoroughly you can cover it.

ESSAY #3 ASSIGNMENT

English 2, Sections A & D
Lehigh University

B. Jensen-Osinski, Instructor
Spring, 1981

Plato wrote, "The unexamined life is not worth living."

Florida Scott-Maxwell wrote,

> I often want to say to people, "You have neat, tight expectations of what life ought to give you, but you won't get it. That isn't what life does. Life does not accommodate you, it shatters you. It is meant to, and it couldn't do it better. Every seed destroys its container or else there would be no fruition."
>
> But some wouldn't hear, and some would shatter themselves on principle.

For your third essay assignment, please write a three-page essay in which you explore the meaning of one of the above two quotations.

Select the quotation that you feel has some truth to it. First, explain what you feel the writer meant when he or she wrote it. Then, using examples from any of the literature we have read this semester, show how the quotation you chose is true or untrue in the case of one or two characters. (Exceptions: Do not use either Porter's "Old Mortality" or Agee's A Death in the Family.)

Think carefully about what character or characters you want to write about. It is permissible to write about characters from different works of literature. Do not write about more than two, though.

ESSAY #4 ASSIGNMENT

English 2, Sections A & D
Lehigh University

B. Jensen-Osinski, Instructor
Spring, 1981

Write a two-and-a-half-page letter to one of the characters in the literature you have read for class recently, about one of the following subjects:

Friendship	Continuity
Fear	Witnessing
Loneliness	Married Life
Growth of character	Mortality

The letter must be written to express a particular thesis. Remember that the more you narrow your subject and thesis, the more successful your writing is likely to be. You should aim for the same degree of organization and clarity that you have worked to attain in your other essays.

Write directly to the character as if you were to send the letter yourself, and sign the letter with your own name. Express your own ideas and opinions on the subject you choose, but be sure your letter will make sense to the character to whom you are writing. You are not writing for your own benefit, but for the eyes of Prufrock, or Binx, or Aunt Nannie Gay, or Mrs. Todd, etc.

If you write "across time," that is, from April, 1981 to, say, July, 1912, remember that you may have to modify your writing so that the person living in 1912 will understand you. (If you mention civil rights laws or a trip in a jet plane, you'll have to do some explaining.) Please decide ahead of time at exactly what point in the character's life you are writing to him or her. For example, if you write to Sophia Jane, in "The Old Order," are you addressing her when she is a child, or on her wedding day, or on a summer day when she is sitting on the porch of the summer house with Nannie Gay, sewing quilts?

Write to a character from one of the following works. Do not choose a character you discussed in your last essay.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," by T. S. Eliot

"The Foreigner," by Sarah Orne Jewett

The Moviegoer, by Walker Percy

"The Older Order," by Katherine Anne Porter

"Separating," by John Updike

ESSAY #5 ASSIGNMENT

English 2, Sections A & D
Lehigh University

B. Jensen-Osinski, Instructor
Spring, 1981

For your final essay assignment, select ONE of the three questions listed below, answering it in a two-and-a-half-page essay. You will be comparing your (present or future) self or an older person you know with one (or more) of the following characters:

- Lucinda Matlock in "Lucinda Matlock," by Edgar Lee Masters,
- The speaker in "Spring and Fall," by Gerard Manley Hopkins,
- Miniver Cheevey in "Miniver Cheevey," by Edwin Arlington Robinson, and
- Eben Flood in "Mr. Flood's Party," by Edwin Arlington Robinson.

Select one of the following questions and answer it as if you were writing a short feature article for publication in an alumni bulletin or local newspaper:

1. If you are younger that 65, imagine that you are now over the age of 65. How do you see yourself at this stage of life? Compare yourself with one or more of the characters listed above, in order to help the reader know what you are really like.

2. If you are now over 65, how do you see yourself? Compare yourself with one or more of the characters listed above, in order to help the reader know what this person is really like.

3. Describe a person over the age of 65 whom you know fairly well. What sort of a person is this, and how do you know? Compare this person with one or more of the characters listed above, in order to help the reader know what this person is really like.

APPENDIX E

MIDTERM AND FINAL EXAMINATIONS GIVEN TO TWO FRESHMAN ENGLISH CLASSES STUDYING THE LIFE CYCLE THEME

MIDTERM EXAMINATION

English 2, Sections A & D
Lehigh University

B. Jensen-Osinski, Instructor
Spring, 1981

Instructions:

Select three (3) of the following five questions, and write one good paragraph in response to each. Each paragraph should contain between five and seven sentences. Base your response on the texts you have read, and give examples to prove your points.

* * * * * * * * *

1. In "Departure" (from Winesburg, Ohio), how does Sherwood Anderson convey the impression that George Willard has moved from his own past into a new present?

2. Anson Hunter, in Fitzgerald's "The Rich Boy," and Blanche Dubois, in T. Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire, both have difficult thirtieth birthdays. What do they have in common with each other, causing "birthday trauma"?

3. In James Agee's novel, A Death in the Family, Mary and Andrew are strongly affected by Jay's death. Write a paragraph in which you explore how one of these two characters changes as a result of the death in the family.

4. If you were forced to make a choice, in whose shoes would you rather be at the end of A Streetcar Named Desire, Stella's or Blanche's? Why? (When you consider this question, ask yourself which of the two sisters you feel was more hurt by Stanley's rape of Blanche.)

5. If you were William Carlos Williams's wife, Flossie, how would you respond to the poem, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower"? Give your honest emotional response. You may refer to lines in the "Coda" as well as to the lines you remember my reading in class.

FINAL EXAMINATION

English 2, Sections A & D
Lehigh University

B. Jensen-Osinski, Instructor
Spring, 1981

INSTRUCTIONS:

Select ONE of the two essay topics below, and write a four- to five-paragraph essay. The finished essay should be the equivalent of a two-paged typed essay, so estimate that you will fill roughly two sheets of paper on both sides (making a total of four sides).

You have two full hours to complete the essay even though this is considered a ninety-minute exam. Keep in mind the same requisites for a good essay that we have discussed all semester: sensible organization, vivid illustrations, and good transitions to help the reader move from one thought to the next.

TOPIC #1

Both Saul Bellow's novel, Seize the Day, and Willa Cather's story, "Neighbor Rosicky," explore relationships between fathers and their middle-aged sons.

Write an essay in which you express your ideas on what a parent-child relationship should be like when children have become middle-aged adults. Be sure you have a strong central thesis. Use examples from either Bellow's or Cather's fiction to bring your essay to life.

TOPIC #2

The two characters, Tom, in Jason Miller's play, That Championship Season, and Binx, in Walker Percy's novel, The Moviegoer, might be classified as cynics because both of them question the values of people around them. They actually see things and behave very differently from one another, however, and we might even say that Binx is a "healthy" cynic while Tom is an "unhealthy" one.

Write an essay in which you either defend healthy cynicism as a way of arriving at the truth, or argue that cynicism leads only to despair. Take a stand, one way or the other, and use examples from your own life experiences and/or observations as well as examples from either Miller's or Percy's work to bring your essay to life.

APPENDIX F

SOME THOUGHTS ON GROWING OLDER -- AN ASSIGNMENT FOR SMALL GROUPS

Note: After discussing one of the following quotations, each group of four students composed a paragraph representing the group's response. I have presented each quotation here, followed by the two responses from the two classes. All paragraphs were written and presented orally by regular freshman students.

(1) "'They say we are going downhill—but they are wrong. We are going uphill, which is why it is such heavy going!'"

Quoted by Ronald Blythe of an elderly English woman in The View in Winter. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1979, p. 238.

Group 1, intergenerational class:

The person who wrote this seems to be going through a turning point herself. She talks about the increasing effort involved in achieving certain things as opposed to the mentioned incapability of doing them any more. She is changing her style of life quite a lot because she recognizes that she is probably losing her physical capabilities, but this doesn't mean she is losing overall. She feels that, as much as she is leaving, she is also gaining, only this time what she is gaining is wisdom. This process is difficult for her, as all changes are, and because of this, people think that she is falling apart. She is not. As a matter of fact, we think that just by thinking in this way, she has gained a lot. She has stood up for herself and has let everyone know that she is self-confident, proud, and able to do whatever she proposes to.

Group 1, all-freshman class:

The words "downhill" and "uphill" have double meanings. "Downhill" has the connotations of improving with age or life becoming easier with age and, "uphill" has the reverse meanings, respectively. We analyzed the quote using the first definitions of these words. Katherine Anne Porter's character, "Grandma," in her younger years, was dominated by her parents, her husband, and her financial position caused by the Civil War, but as she grew older she gained even more control over her own life and over the lives of those around her.

Binx had an uphill battle within himself due to his search for direction in life, but the fact that he found himself proves he was improving with age.

Prufrock, like Binx, found himself in inner turmoil as he grew older--should he dare change?

(2) "'Is not old wine wholesomest, old pippins toothsomest, old wood burn brightest, old linen wash whitest? Old soldiers, sweethearts, are surest, and old lovers are soundest.'"

Quoted from John Webster in Blythe, p. 259.

Group 2, intergenerational class:

Our group partially agrees with John Webster's quote. We agree that some people do indeed improve with age as the items in the quote do. But on the other hand, just as wine can improve with age, it can also turn to vinegar. Aging is a question of quality and not quantity.

Lucinda Matlock was an example of the sweetest grape. She was happy with her life and lived for each and every day. She was not content with standing still. She knew it took life to love life. On the other hand, Dr. Adler, of Seize the Day, has gone bad in his old age. He has experienced his sweetest days, and now has gone sour on his son as well as the world. This type of person can cause misery for everyone. Thus we feel a person can improve with age, just as easily as he can go bad. One must want to and work hard to lead a happy and fulfilled life to reach the level of the finest wines.

Group 2, all-freshman class:

Old people are put down constantly in our age, as being incapable of accomplishing things as well as young people. John Webster's quote rebukes this feeling. He states generally, "older is better." We have seen support for this quote in the literature we have read. Sophia Jane says "oldest is best." Neighbor Rosicky's charm is much more sound as opposed to younger people's. Dr. Adler grew older and seemed to become wiser than Wilhelm, who was mixed up as a young man. Tamkin, as he grew old, became quite masterful. We have seen through literature that the aging of something generally enhances its quality and is the major point of this quote.

(3) "Age is truly a time of heroic helplessness. One is confronted by one's own incorrigibility. I am always saying to myself, 'Look at you, and after a lifetime of trying.' I still have the vices that I have known and struggled with--well it seems like since birth. Many of them are modified, but not much. I can neither order nor command the hubbub of my mind. Or is it my nervous sensibility? This is not the effect of age; age only defines one's boundaries. Life has changed me greatly, it has improved me greatly, but it has also left me practically the same. I cannot spell, I am over critical, egocentric and vulnerable. I cannot be simple. In my effort to be clear I become complicated. I know my faults so well that I pay them small heed. They are stronger than I am. They are me."

Florida Scott-Maxwell, The Measure of My Days. New York: Penguin Books, 1968, pp. 17-18.

Group 3, intergenerational class:

Heroic helplessness. The heroism is in the acceptance of the helplessness. In youth you feel that you can conquer the world. In the journey of life you realize the futility of attempting to right all wrongs because of man's inhumanity to man. You increase your ability to understand your limitations. There are no simple answers. Life is what it is. The stresses that plagued you before will crop up, but you can't get away with the irrational actions of before. This is the modification of the vices you have struggled with since birth. You develop a tolerance from a deeper sense of understanding of people and situations. Your boundaries are defined. Simple solutions do not exist to major problems and futility comes from the inability to distinguish the bood and the bad. The higher you climb, the more you can see. The more you can see, the more you become aware of what is left to learn.

Group 3, all-freshman class:

I have been alive for 89 years now, and I've been improving with age. What's this I'm reading about this here Florida Scott-Maxwell character ranting and raving about not changing and incorrigibility and views. And what's this balony about the hubbub of the mind. I'm 91 years old now and I'm sharp as a tack, and, like fine wine, I'm improving with age. This Maxwell Scott person is a dadgun liar. How can she say she can't spell when she wrote the stinking story? I don't think old age made her lose her mind; she didn't have

one to start with. How can she report such falsities? I'm close to 90 and I can do things better now than I ever did in my life. I got rid of my vices when I was a young man of 73. No more smoking, drinking, or loose women. And now I'm in my late 80's and I still do 15 pushups a day (3 at a time). You youngsters take my advice and don't believe this Florida Scott person. She's a senile old goat whose ideas can't be further from the truth.

(4) "Differing and belonging is only one of our problems, but so important that without those two strong threads binding each other there would be no living cloth, usable and durable. How much containment is necessary, of how much daring and originality are we capable? Man's pugnacity and his evasions must be made up of this question. We, our pattern, what makes us ourselves to ourselves, can be destroyed by alien influences, yet without the new we may be stultified. It takes great courage to open our minds and hearts, yet it is required of us to our last breath."

Florida Scott-Maxwell, pp. 70-71.

Group 4, intergenerational class:

We agreed that life is what you make it. To enjoy life to its fullest you must keep your heart and mind open. Everyone is the same no matter what age, for age is only a number. Florida Scott-Maxwell says differing and belonging is the biggest problem. We agree. Without others there would be no reason to live. Everyone needs to belong yet also retain his own identity. You need the courage in life to be an individual and yet be open to others' ideas, in a group. When you are younger you need courage not to reject the advice of older people, but when older you need courage to keep an open mind unless you already have formed an opinion from your own experience. For without younger people, there would be no new experiences.

Group 4, all-freshman class:

A we grow older it takes more courage to be open-minded to change because we have become comfortable with the lives over which we have control. New influences are always affecting us, and we are torn between belonging (by conforming) and differing, and still remaining the unique individuals we are. It takes courage to accept new ideas because we also risk losing some of our old selves. The

grandmother, in "The Old Order," is an example of a person who, as she grew older, changed less. As a young woman she was radical in her decision to nurse her own children and even Nanny's son, but the older she got the more she resisted change by holding tightly to her memories of the days that she had controlled.

(5)

I live like a baby
Who bursts into laughter
At a sunbeam on the wall,
Or like a very old woman
Entranced by the prick of stars
Through the leaves.

From May Sarton, "Gestalt at Sixty," in Selected Poems of May Sarton, Serena Sue Hilsinger and Lois Brynes, eds. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978.

Group 5, intergenerational class:

The poet has an ambivalent feeling about life. He sees life as a baby as easy: nothing to worry about, no cares, just easy going. Because a baby has no cares, he can appreciate a sunbeam. An old woman is just the same. She would have no cares, because her life is almost over. She is not worried about next week's test or tomorrow's day of work or anything. She can appreciate the beauty of stars on a clear night the same way a baby can appreciate a sunbeam. So many people in the middle, that is, between being a baby and being very old, cannot appreciate a sunbeam or a starry evening because they are so wrapped up with many things, tests, jobs, car payments, etc. It is nice to know that the poet also can appreciate these things of beauty like a child or like an old woman.

(Note: I must inject that the older students in the class took issue with this student's assertion that older people have as few cares as babies. The young man who wrote the paragraph said he had not really meant to say that; he had intended to convey the idea that the very young and the very old are probably more open than those in the middle to appreciation of beautiful things.)

Group 5, all-freshman class:

May Sarton appears to be middle-aged. She is somewhere in between the two extremes of a baby and a very old woman. It is similar to a two way mirror: she is looking both ways and discovering different things about herself. Sunbeams on the wall and the prick of stars through the leaves are fairly natural happenings that she's seen all her life. May Sarton seems to be trying to show that no matter what age she is, these things will still thrill her. However, with age, there is a difference in her reactions. As a baby she bursts into laughter, and as an older woman she becomes entranced. She is very good at putting herself in the actual frame of mind of a baby or of an old woman. The members of our group found that going back in time was not too difficult, but looking ahead was near impossible. We decided that because May Sarton was older she had a better view of what her life would be like. We are going through a transition period in which it is difficult to know what we will be doing or feeling 20, 40, 50 years from now. May Sarton believes her feeling for certain natural phenomena such as stars and sunbeams will not change but will only cause different reactions.